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SCALES FOR THE STUDY OF CHILDREN'S CHARACTERISTICS.

BY EUGENE RANDOLPH SMITH.

Recent issues of *THE MATHEMATICS TEACHER* have given considerable attention to standardized tests and their influence on the teaching of mathematics. The authors, Dr. Minnick and Dr. Rogers, while they are convinced of the value of such tests, recognize their limitations, up to this time, in that they test the more routine kinds of work. They, with other investigators, have been trying to develop tests that will gage the fundamental qualities that underlie successful accomplishment in the subjects in question.

A criticism of all standardized tests that has been quite widespread is that the finer qualities of mind and soul do not lend themselves to definite measurement, and so are likely to become undervalued and underemphasized, if teachers are primarily judged by the results of such tests.

There seems to be some justice in this contention, especially where insufficient supervision fails to guard against such dangers. On the other hand, the value of these tests has proved itself in many ways both in analyzing and helping to correct weaknesses, and in determining what is a fair expectation in the various subjects.

The solution seems to me to be directing the teachers' attention to child development and the importance of the moral and social characteristics, as well as those particularly affecting school work. If a combination of subjective and objective methods can give a school an all around knowledge of a pupil, and enable it to study his development from year to year, the ideal of an intelligent diagnosis of each pupil's needs will be in a fair way to be reached.

In The Park School, in addition to objective methods, subjective judgments of salient characteristics of pupils have been an important part of its records ever since the school opened. Experience has modified the forms and methods, and has shown

various weaknesses, but even in their least valuable forms the records proved their worth very conclusively.

The latest development worked out in this school consists in a card system that takes up the child from the following viewpoints: Intelligence, Physical, Social and Moral, School Work, Standardized Tests, General Information, Home Conditions, Supplementary Remarks, with a manual of scales by which to mark the characteristics under each head.*

It is expected that the system will help to accomplish the following aims:

To help the teacher to think in terms of children and their development rather than chiefly of lessons.

To bring to the surface those indications in each child that show some particular need (either shown by a single report, or brought out by reports through a number of years), and, in many cases, to suggest the best way to meet this need; the comparative study made possible by the reports of all a pupil's teachers is especially helpful in this.

To give the supervisor a better insight into the life of the school; such records not only give information about the pupils, but often prove the most valuable guides for correcting conditions and helping the teachers.

To serve as a basis for judgment as to the best course to be pursued by a pupil in school, and as a help in advising him when he leaves school; parents also can often be helped to wise decisions by making it possible for them to see such studies of their children.

To keep in condensed form a complete record of the pupil's school life, so that it will serve as a permanent source of information from which questions of prospective employers, or other justified inquiries can be helpfully answered.

To enable a college to ask for, and a school to give, a definite and helpful report on a candidate's qualifications.

The subheads under "Social and Moral" are Attitude or Public Spirit, Honesty, Sociability, Consideration, Self-Control and Poise, Initiative, and Leadership. Those under "School Work" are Interest, Industry, Concentration, Perseverance, Self-Reliance, Care and Neatness, and Progress.

* "Card System and Manual of Pupil Analysis," by Eugene R. Smith. Published by C. W. Bardeen, Syracuse, N. Y.

The teacher places a child in one of five defined groups in each characteristic, the fact of the group's being definitely outlined insuring something of a common language and a common understanding between teachers. For example, certain typical scales define these groups or classes as follows:

Industry.

Class 1. Those who try to get as much as possible from the course, showing enough interest and initiative to investigate beyond the teacher's requirement.

2. Those who conscientiously meet all requirements, both in giving attention and in doing assigned tasks.

3. Those who have the general intention of conscientiously applying themselves to their studies, but fail often enough in carrying out this intention to force the teacher to take too much responsibility for work the pupil should do.

4. Those who are decidedly irregular in their attention and application, so that the teacher must continually apply pressure.

5. Those who will not, or cannot, hold their attention to their work. This may be shown in class, in project work or study, or in all.

Leadership.

Note: Do not confuse popularity with leadership.

Class 1. Those who are leaders by free choice of their comrades and who succeed in that leadership without antagonizing others.

2. Those who lead by the domination—

(a) of personality.

(b) of mentality.

(c) of physical superiority.

(d) Those who are freely chosen as leaders, but whose carrying out of the leadership is only moderately well done.

3. (a) Those who show restricted qualities of leadership, shown only where they are particularly interested or expert, or in helping to work out group plans.

(b) Those who, while too individual to follow others, have not developed the ability to get others to follow them.

4. Those who coöperate somewhat in group projects, and show some intelligence in helping to choose the leaders.

5. Those who are indiscriminating followers.

The numerical mark should be followed by a + for those who show a positive influence for good, even though the one marked shows no high degree of leadership, and by a — for those whose influence is detrimental.

Perseverance.

Class 1. Those who are unwilling to give up a project that has been undertaken, even though the only reason for persevering is a desire to achieve.

2. Those who persist in any undertaking for which they have some definite motive besides the desire to achieve.

3. Those who are generally conscientious in completing a task undertaken but are likely to be discouraged by difficulties.

4. Those who will not continue a struggle unless they think they see success almost within reach.

5. Those who are unable or unwilling to force themselves to attack difficulties.

Consideration.

Class 1. Those who are thoughtful of others, even at the expense of their own interests, and express this thoughtfulness in the formalities of courtesy.

2. Those who are careful of others' rights, and courteous in their observance of them.

3. Those who, while courteous in intent, and with a sense of fairness, thoughtlessly violate the observance of courtesy.

4. Those who are heedless of others' rights.

5. Those who selfishly violate others' rights and show no desire to be courteous.

Perhaps the most interesting scale is that for intelligence. Subjective scales for this marking have suffered in the past from failing to analyze the child's mind as it showed in school work because of their association of uncorrelated mental characteristics, and from an attempt to make too many exclusive classes, thus confusing the teacher by fine distinctions.

As intelligence is very difficult to judge, and the variations in detail are very great, a four place numerical system of marking has been devised. This requires the teacher to judge each of four characteristics of the child's mind as it shows in her work

rather than to give a single mark for intelligence. While this does not ask for very fine distinctions under each head, the result is a rather definite intelligence classification.

A. Initiative and Originality.

Class 1. Those generally able to start and carry on projects or investigations without suggestion from others.

2. Those generally able to carry on alone projects or investigations started or outlined by others.

3. Those who can help in group projects or investigations. They may show a higher degree of initiative or originality where they have particular interest or expertness. (For example, a boy whose father is an electrician may appear to have more originality in this line because his environment has helped him to acquire greater skill and knowledge of it.)

4. Those who show little originality themselves, but appreciate the initiative and originality in others enough to follow their lead or to imitate them.

5. Those who are almost or entirely dependent in their thinking.

Note: If a pupil has the originality to think out a project completely, but lacks perseverance or the practical ability to carry it out entirely, he should still receive credit for his originality, but his weakness should be shown under some other head (such as perseverance) or should be pointed out under "Remarks."

B. Reasoning, including the Ability to Grasp the Facts on which the Reasoning is Based.

Class 1. Those who are capable of a complete grasp of all sides of a subject, and of reasoning accurately about abstract as well as concrete matters.

2. Those who show a good grasp of facts and reason well about them unless the steps of the reasoning become quite complex or too deep, when they become confused.

3. Those who are somewhat uncertain in their reasoning, sometimes basing it on insufficient data. They reason much better concerning definitely concrete matters, and in that with which they are specially familiar.

4. Those who see only part of the facts, and find it difficult to see relationships between them, and to draw accurate conclusions.

5. Those who are very dull. They grasp only simple ideas, and are almost or wholly incapable of abstract reasoning.

C. Speed of Learning.

Class 1. Those who after once hearing or reading subject matter (the length and complexity depending on the age of the child) know accurately the facts stated.

2. Those who get a fair idea of content from once hearing or reading, but need a repetition to complete the understanding.

3. Those who approximate the success of Class 2 on shorter or less complex material, or who need still another repetition to fix the details of the content.

4. Those who learn only by considerable repetition and effort.

5. Those who are very slow, making little headway in the time used by an average child for the same purpose.

Note: There will often be a difference in the ease with which the child learns through the ear and through the eye. A note should be made under "Remarks" when the child is thought to be "Earminded" or "Eyeminded."

D. Retention.

Class 1. Those who remember in usable form practically all that has been learned.

2. Those whose memories are good. The difference between one of this group and one of Class 1 may lie in a less complete memory, or in remembering for a shorter time.

3. Those who have fair memories. They remember well where a strong interest appeals to them, but may lose even important matters if this motive is lacking. They bring back facts after being reminded by others, but seem to have less ability than the higher classes to draw at will from their store of knowledge.

4. Those whose memories are unreliable. They may remember facts incorrectly, or know what has been learned for a short period only, losing it nearly, if not quite, as soon as it serves an immediate purpose.

5. Those whose memories are very poor. They hold only simple facts, except with great effort.

In using this intelligence classification a teacher marks a pupil by a four-figure number, as 2234, which would indicate that the

child showed considerable originality when given slight help, was above the average in grasp of data and ability to reason about it, but was only normal in speed and did not retain well. Such a child would evidently merit study to find why with such good ability in reasoning and originating there should be subsequent loss of what had been learned.

It will be seen that while this method of marking intelligence does not require very fine distinctions on the teacher's part, it makes it possible to give a child any one of 625 intelligence ratings, and presents a four-sided view of his intelligence as it appears to the teacher.

Although supervisors and teachers generally are willing to concede the value of such attempts as these to study the pupils, there arises the very natural question as to the possibility of teachers finding time to do such intensive marking.

In the first place the complete marking is done but once a year, in December, when the teacher has had time to study the pupils, but it is still early enough to use the results of that study. Certain additions and corrections may be made later, but do not take much time.

The question then comes to this: "Is it worth while for a teacher to know her pupils well enough to judge with some accuracy their most important characteristics?" If it is, whatever time is spent in actually recording the results of her study of the pupils is a minor matter, and is undoubtedly justified by the aims given at the beginning of this paper. Even if less time is given by the teacher to lesson preparing and other routine obligations while this investigation is under way, the final result in better understood pupils will enable her to more than make up any loss of time before the end of the year.

After all, it is ridiculous to prescribe before we diagnose. If teachers cannot diagnose under present conditions, then those conditions must be changed. Some method of complete, reasonably scientific, child study is absolutely necessary, and the sooner we recognize this and perfect that neglected side of our school procedure, the better it will be for education and for our pupils.

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